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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

AF/PD FOR D. FOLEY AND C. DALTON
AF/S FOR M. RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

1E. O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO OIIP ZI

SUBJECT: INFLUENCE ANALYSIS -- ZIMBABWE

Introduction: Public Diplomacy Environment

11. (SBU) Zimbabwe's media operating environment is restrictive and becoming increasingly harsh. The GOZ's Media and Information Commission (MIC) closed the only independent daily newspaper, the Daily News, and has threatened other independent newspapers and journalists with legal action. Security forces and ruling party supporters harassed, intimidated, and beat journalists. Authorities arbitrarily detained journalists and refused to investigate or punish those who assaulted journalists. Journalists practiced self-censorship. Most foreign journalists have been expelled from or denied entry to the country. Compounding the repressive legal environment are a deep-seated political polarization that cleaves society and the ruling party's refusal to engage meaningfully with the opposition on any issue of import.

12. (SBU) Several major daily newspapers and one local-language tabloid belong to the Mass Media Trust (MMT), a holding company heavily influenced by the ruling party, ZANU-PF. The Government, through the MMT, controlled two daily newspapers, the Chronicle and the Herald. With the demise of The Daily News, the Herald is the most read newspaper in the country. Government-controlled newspapers generally are read with considerable skepticism by educated urban populations but are influential among ruling party faithful. News coverage in the MMT newspapers generally focuses on the activities of government officials, neglects opposition parties and other antigovernment groups, and also downplays events or information that reflect adversely on the Government. They are relentless in their portrayal of the USG as part of a conspiracy (including white farmers and the United Kingdom) to overthrow the GOZ. The Minister for Information and Publicity controls the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency wire service. Nonetheless, the Mission is trying to cultivate latent interest among numerous journalists from the official media who see value in a cordial albeit discreet relationship.

13. (SBU) In addition to the Daily News, which had the nation's largest circulation until its closure, there are three independent major weeklies (the Financial Gazette, the Independent, and the Standard), and three monthlies that continued to operate despite threats and pressure from the Government. The major independent newspapers continue to monitor government policies and publish stories critical of the government, but most of them also continued to exercise self-censorship in reporting due to growing government intimidation and the continuing prospect of prosecution under criminal libel and security laws. They are read principally in urban areas. The Mission's Information Resource Center, which records about 100,000 visits per year, is another source of independent information among those in the capital.

14. (SBU) Radio remains the most important medium of public communication, particularly for the majority of the population living in rural areas. The Government continued to control all domestic radio broadcasting stations through the state-owned Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), supervised by the Minister for Information and Publicity in the President's Office. There are credible reports that the Minister routinely reviews ZBC news and repeatedly excises reports on the activities of groups and organizations opposed to or critical of the Government. There are only two independent short wave radio broadcasts in the country; however, it is unclear how many citizens could actually listen to short wave broadcasts. Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts a 1-hour program five times a week on short wave and AM featuring interviews with local opinion makers on a range of topics in English, Shona, and Ndebele. Short Wave Radio Africa broadcast daily from the United Kingdom, using local sources and reporters.

15. (SBU) The Government controls all domestic television broadcasting stations, and ZBC owns and operates television broadcasting facilities. Broadcast media coverage's biases mirror those of the government-controlled print media. The Government continues to refuse to lease broadcast time to Joy TV, the only privately licensed television station, and it remained off the air. International television broadcasts were available freely through private satellite firms; however, the requirement that payment must be made exclusively in foreign currency made it unavailable for most citizens.

MPP Goal: Democratic System and Practices

16. (SBU) It is hard to get our message out. Given GOZ hostility to the USG, principal avenues to engage on democracy issues are via personal engagement with selected influential individuals within or close to the government and widespread electronic dissemination of USG positions/statements (e.g., The Washington File) to press outlets, academics, and NGOs. Effective placements in the official media regarding U.S. policy on democracy and human rights are rare in undistorted form. Efforts to place pieces in the independent weeklies yield modest success, which generally is constrained by self-censorship and the weeklies' limited readership. Public diplomacy through engagement with Zimbabwe's broad network of NGOs is handicapped by severe GOZ pressure on NGOs that share our objectives, especially in their information dissemination activities, and by the NGOs' limited reach to key audiences. Prospects for being able to describe and defend U.S. policies effectively in the foreseeable future are not good. Demonization of the United States is a principal GOZ tactic in attempting to unify and to motivate its supporters; the GOZ can be counted on to continue resisting and actively suppressing dissenting views generally, and positive portrayals of the USG in particular. Accordingly, foremost among mission priorities is amendment of draconian legal and practical restrictions on freedom of speech but favorable government action is not likely in the foreseeable future.

MPP Goal: Assistance for Refugees and Other Victims

17. (SBU) The environment for public diplomacy in this area is complicated, notwithstanding the generous levels of humanitarian assistance we lavish on Zimbabwe each year. A constant tension exists between the GOZ and donors over the GOZ's desire to direct to its supporters, project control over, and take credit for food distribution and public health services, the principal areas of our assistance in Zimbabwe. This tension is expected to sharpen in the run-up to national parliamentary elections scheduled for next March. GOZ efforts to control food and health resources already are increasing and official news outlets and public officials are manipulating coverage to political advantage and downplaying the impact of donor activities. Nonetheless, we are enjoying some success in placing articles about USG assistance, and our contacts in the GOZ and NGO community represent strong channels for personal engagement.

MPP Goal: Global Health

18. (SBU) Government suspicion of USG motives has complicated public diplomacy efforts in this area as well. For example, the Ministry of Information prevented transmission of a USG-funded innovative radio soap opera to heighten HIV/AIDS awareness, despite strong support from civil society and the Ministry of Public Health. Nevertheless, the official media has been willing to print material accurately describing USG activities in support of USG objectives. In addition, USAID and CDC have collaborated on successful media and community-based behavior change communication programs targeting youth and young adults. The mission is working with faith-based organizations to influence behavior at the community level and is expanding the role of family planning community-based outreach workers to include HIV/AIDS prevention activities. As with other areas of humanitarian assistance, our contacts in relevant ministries and civil society effectively buttress the limited public diplomacy opportunities available through traditional media.

MPP Goal: American Values Respected Abroad

19. (SBU) Our goal is to strengthen the pillars of democracy, including a free flow of information and support for a free press. Zimbabwe's ever-shrinking atmosphere to support free debate is an overarching obstacle that increasingly handicaps our efforts across the board. Accordingly, we attach high priority in collaborating with Zimbabwean individuals and institutions that share our objectives to ameliorate the draconian laws and policies

used to stifle information flow. Given the hostile environment, our strategy must be flexible and opportunistic, essentially employing all the means referred to above: media placements where possible; widespread electronic dissemination of materials to influential players; academic events; and personal engagement.

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